

ATTENTION: SCHOOL FUNDING ADVOCATES!

The New Student Opportunity Act (SOA) Means More Funding for Your Local Schools, But Your Voice is Needed Now on How It Should Be Spent

The SOA is a major achievement, the result of years of advocacy to address vast inequities in state school funding. It will bring desperately needed funds to Massachusetts public schools, especially in districts serving students with the greatest needs. But it must be spent well by districts to achieve its goal: a quality education for every student.

All districts must develop a three-year spending plan by APRIL 1, 2020, for funding beginning July 1. Districts must solicit and consider local public input. THAT'S WHERE YOU COME IN!

ADD YOUR VOICE

How can new funding help my child's district or school?

- **CONTACT** your local school committee members (go on your city or town's website for contact information) AND/OR attend a public meeting to find out how this will impact your school district, and to provide your input to its spending plan.
- **SUGGESTIONS** for input (in writing, if possible): Tell the school committee how you think they should use new funding to improve your schools: such as reducing class size, expanding early childhood education, providing full-day kindergarten, school counselors or nurses, reinstating art, music, physical education or recess, or other programs you think your schools need.
- **DO** provide specific suggestions, but you do not need to estimate the costs.
- **SEND** your suggestions to your school committee members, as well as your

superintendent. You may also want to include a copy of this fact sheet.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE NEW LAW

What is the Student Opportunity Act (SOA)?

- Passed in December 2019 by the Massachusetts Legislature, the SOA updates the state's Foundation Budget formula – the formula Massachusetts uses to determine the minimum cost of an adequate public education and the amount of state funding cities and towns receive each year to supplement local public school funding.
- The formula distributes "Chapter 70" state aid to local school budgets, taking into account the demographic profile of its students as well as the local community's aggregate wealth and income. The formula hadn't been updated since 1993, when it was first established, so it was badly out of date.
- This new formula will add *\$1.4 billion* in Chapter 70 school aid over the next seven years. The SOA also establishes \$10 million per year in grants for "innovative" programs (the "Twenty-First Century Education Trust Fund"), and increases other forms of school aid for school building renovation, transportation,

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charter reimbursement and special education. This fact sheet focuses on Chapter 70.

- For even more on the law, see: www.fundourfuturema.org

What is required in the three-year district plan?

- **ALL cities and towns must submit a three-year plan to the state by April 1, 2020.**
- These plans must indicate how your school district proposes to close any “achievement gaps,” using “evidence-based” programs such as (but not limited to) a list of nine programs listed in the law. Plans must include “outcome metrics” the district will use to see whether disparities are getting smaller. All plans will be made public on the state’s Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website.
- The guidelines may sound like the state is prescribing exactly how the money must be used, leaving little room for local stakeholder input. However, some items on the list are broad, like hiring personnel to “best support improved student performance.” And some of the money can be used for other expenses.

What does the law say about public input into these plans?

- **The law requires superintendents to solicit and consider public input.** It says “Each district’s plan shall be developed by the superintendent in consultation with the school committee and shall consider input and recommendations from parents and other relevant community stakeholders, including but not limited to, special education and English learner parent advisory councils, school improvement councils and educators in the school district.”

Will my district get more funding? Where can I find out the amount?

- **Every district will receive increases** under the SOA but the amount will vary depending on their student populations. Chapter 70 estimates are provided in “cherry sheets,” along with other local aid, and are updated as the budget becomes final: <https://www.mass.gov/lists/cherry-sheet-estimates>
- **The law was designed to give the most funding to lower-income districts, so some districts will get large increases and others more modest ones.**
- The Act creates a special study commission to address the challenges of small and rural districts with declining enrollments.
- Contact your legislator to learn more about projected funding for your district: <https://malegislature.gov/search/findmylegislator>

Does the money have to be spent on schools?

- The new law increased the minimum amount of money that is required to be spent per pupil in each district. If your district was spending only what was required under the old law, then yes, the new money must be spent on your schools.
- But if your district was already spending more than the minimum, it’s only required by law to meet the new higher minimum. *It’s up to parents, teachers, and other people concerned about children’s education to insist that schools in your community get the full amount of additional state funding. Otherwise, your city or town could divert the new funding to other community expenses.*

Questions? Contact:
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